

Nuosu language

Nuosu or **Nosu** (ꨀꨣꨳ, transcribed as: *Nuosuhxop*), also known as **Northern Yi**, **Liangshan Yi**, and **Sichuan Yi**, is the prestige language of the Yi people; it has been chosen by the Chinese government as the standard Yi language (Chinese: 彝語) and, as such, is the only one taught in schools, both in its oral and written forms. It was spoken by two million people and was increasing as of (PRC census); 60% were monolingual (1994 estimate). Nuosu is the native Nuosu/Yi name for their own language and is not used in Mandarin Chinese; although it may sometimes be spelled out for pronunciation (simplified Chinese: 诺苏语; traditional Chinese: 諾蘇語; pinyin: *nuòsū yǔ*), the Chinese characters for *nuòsū* have no meaning.^[3]

The occasional terms 'Black Yi' (黑彝; *hēi Yí*) and 'White Yi' (白彝; *bái Yí*) are castes of the Nuosu people, not dialects.

Nuosu is one of several often mutually unintelligible varieties known as Yi, Lolo, Moso, or Noso; the six Yi languages recognized by the Chinese government hold only 25% to 50% of their vocabulary in common. They share a common traditional writing system, though this is used for shamanism rather than daily accounting.

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Dialects of Nuosu

Nuosu	
 Northern Yi, Liangshan Yi, Sichuan Yi	
ꨀꨣꨳ <i>Nuosuhxop</i>	
Native to	China
Region	Southern Sichuan, northern Yunnan
Ethnicity	Yi
Native speakers	2 million (2000 census) ^[1]
Language family	Sino-Tibetan - Lolo–Burmese - Loloish - Nisoish - Nisoid Nuosu
Standard forms	Liangshan (Cool Mountain) dialect
Writing system	Yi syllabary, formerly Yi logograms
Language codes	
ISO 639-1	ii (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?iso_639_1=ii) Sichuan Yi, Nuosu
ISO 639-2	iii (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=200)

Lama (2012)

Lama (2012) gives the following classification for Nuosu dialects.

■ Nuosu

- *Qumusu* (Tianba)
- Nuosu proper
 - Nuosu
 - *Muhisu*
 - Nuosu (*nɔʔsuʔ*)
 - *Yinuo*
 - *Shengzha*
 - Niesu (*nieʔsuʔ*)
 - *Suondi*
 - *Adu*

	Sichuan Yi, Nuosu
ISO 639-3	iii Nuosu, Sichuan Yi
Glottolog	sich1238 (http://glottolog.org/resource/1anguoid/id/sich1238) Sichuan Yi ^[2]

The **Qumusu** 曲木苏 (Tianba 田坝) dialect is the most divergent. The other dialects group as **Niesu** 聂苏 (Suondi and Adu) and as **Nuosu proper** (Muhisu 米西苏, Yinuo 义诺, and Shengzha 圣乍). Niesu has lost voiceless nasals and has developed diphthongs.^[4]

Adu 阿都话, characterized by its labial–velar consonants, is spoken in Butuo County 布拖县 and Ningnan County 宁南县 of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan province, and also in parts of Puge County 普格, Zhaojue County 昭觉, Dechang County 德昌, and Jinyang County 金阳 (Pan 2001).^[5]

Nyisu or **Yellow Yi** 黄彝 of Fumin County, Yunnan may either be a Suondi Yi (Nuosu) dialect or Nisu dialect.

Zhu & Zhang (2005)^[6] reports that the **Shuitian** people (水田人) reside mostly in the lowlands of the Anning River drainage basin, in Xichang, Xide, and Mianning counties of Liangshan Prefecture in Sichuan. They are called **Muhisu** (*mu33 hi44 su33*) by the neighboring Yi highland people. Shuitian is spoken in the following locations. Shuitian belongs to the Shengzha dialect (圣乍次土语) of Northern Yi.

- Mianning County: Jionglong 迴龙, Lugu 泸沽, Hebian 河边; Manshuiwan 漫水湾^[7]
- Xichang: Lizhou 礼州, Yuehua 月华
- Xide County: Mianshan 冕山镇 (including Shitoushan Village 石头山村^[7]), Lake 拉克

Bradley (1997)

According to Bradley (1997),^[8] there are 3 main dialects of Nosu, of which the Southeastern one (Sondi) is most divergent.

- Northern
 - Tianba 田坝 AKA Northwestern
 - Yinuo 义诺 AKA Northeastern

- Central (Shengzha 圣乍)
- Southeastern (Sondi)
 - Sondi
 - Adur

Chen (2010)

Chen (2010) lists the following dialects of Nosu. Also listed are the counties where each respective dialect is spoken.

- **Nosu** 诺苏方言
 - Senza, Shèngzhà 圣乍次方言
 - Senza, Shèngzhà 圣乍 (*nɔ̌ʈsuʈ*): 1,200,000 speakers primarily in Xide, Yuexi, Ganluo, Jinyang, Puge, Leibo, Xichang, Dechang, Mianning, Yanyuan, Yanbian, Muli, Shimian, Jiulong, and Luding; also in Huaping, Yongsheng, Ninglang, Lijiang, Jianchuan, Yongshan, and Qiaojia
 - Yino, Yīnuò 义诺 (*nɔ̌ʈsuʈ*): 600,000 speakers primarily in Meigu, Mabian, Leibo, and Ebian, Ganluo; also in Yuexi, Zhaojue, and Jinyang
 - Lidim, Tiánbà 田坝 (*nɔ̌ʈsuʈ*): 100,000 speakers primarily in Ganluo, Yuexi, and Ebian; also in Hanyuan
 - Sodi, Suǒdì 所地次方言 (*nɔ̌ʈsuʈ*): 600,000 speakers primarily in Tuoxian, Huili, Huidong, Ningnan, Miyi, Dechang, and Puge

Writing system

Classic Yi is a syllabic logographic system of 8,000–10,000 glyphs. Although similar to Chinese characters in function, the glyphs are independent in form, with little to suggest a direct relation.

The **Modern Yi** script (ꨀꨁꨂꨃ *nuosu bburma* [nɔ̌sū bḗmā] 'Nosu script') is a standardized syllabary derived from the classic script in 1974 by the local government of China. It was made the official script of the Yi languages in 1980. There are 756 basic glyphs based on the Liangshan dialect, plus 63 for syllables only found in Chinese borrowings.

In 1958 the Chinese government had introduced a Roman-based alphabet based on the romanized script of Gladstone Porteous of Sayingpan.^[9] (This was later replaced by the Yi script.)

Phonology

The written equivalents of the phonemes listed here are "Yi Pinyin". For information about the actual script used see the section above entitled *Writing System*.

Consonants



A signpost in a public park in Xichang, Sichuan, China, showing Modern Yi, Chinese and English text.

		<u>Labial</u>	<u>Alveolar</u>	<u>Retroflex</u>	<u>Palatal</u>	<u>Velar</u>	<u>Glottal</u>
<u>Nasal</u>	voiced	m /m/	n /n/		ny /ɲ/	ng /ŋ/	ɲ
	unvoiced	hm /m̥/	hn /n̥/				
<u>Plosive</u>	prenasalized	nb / ^m b/	nd / ⁿ d/			mg / ^ŋ g/	
	voiced	bb /b/	dd /d/			gg /g/	
	unvoiced	b /p/	d /t/			g /k/	
	aspirated	p /pʰ/	t /tʰ/			k /kʰ/	
<u>Affricate</u>	prenasalized		nz / ⁿ dz/	nr / ^ɲ dʒ/	nj / ⁿ dʒ/		
	voiced		zz /dz/	rr /dʒ/	jj /dʒ/		
	unvoiced		z /ts/	zh /tʂ/	j /tɕ/		
	aspirated		c /tsʰ/	ch /tʂʰ/	q /tɕʰ/		
<u>Fricative</u>	unvoiced	f /f/	s /s/	sh /ʃ/	x /ɕ/	h /x/	hx /h/
	voiced	v /v/	ss /z/	r /ʒ/	y /ʑ/	w /ɣ/	
<u>Lateral</u>	voiced		l /l/				
	unvoiced		hl /ɭ/				

Vowels

		Front	Non-front	
			unrounded	rounded
Syllabic consonant	loose		y /ɹ̥/	u /ɥʷ/
	tight		yr /ɹ̥̚/	ur /ɥ̥ʷ̚/
Near-close	loose	i /e̞/	e /ɤ̞/	o /o̞/
Open-mid	tight	ie /ɛ̚/		uo /ɔ̚/
Open	tight		a /a̚/	

Nuosu has five pairs of phonemic vowels, contrasting in a feature Eatough calls *loose throat* vs. *tight throat*. Underlining is used as an ad-hoc symbol for tight throat; phonetically, these vowels are laryngealized and/or show a retracted tongue root. Loose vs. tight throat is the only distinction in the two pairs of syllabic consonants, but in the vocoids it is reinforced by a height difference.

The syllabic consonants *y(r) u(r)* are essentially the usual Sinological vowels ɿ ʉ, so *y* can be identified with the vowel of the Mandarin 四 *sì* "four", but they have diverse realizations. *Y(r)* completely assimilates to a preceding coronal except in voice, e.g. /ɛ̞ ɹ̥ ɿ̥/ [ɛ̞ ɹ̥ ɿ̥] ʰ xyp "to marry", and are [m̥ɿ̥] after a labial nasal, e.g. /m̥ ɹ̥ ɿ̥ sɹ̥ ɿ̥/ [m̥ m̥ ɿ̥ sɹ̥ ɿ̥] ʰ hmy sy "cloth". *U(r)* assimilates similarly after laterals, retaining its rounding, e.g. /ɥ̥ ɥ̥ʷ ɿ̥/ [ɥ̥ ɥ̥ʷ ɿ̥] ʰ hlu "to stir-fry", and is [m̥ʷ] after a labial nasal, e.g. /m̥ ɥ̥ʷ ɿ̥/ [m̥ m̥ʷ ɿ̥] ʰ hmu "mushroom"; moreover it induces a labially trilled release of preceding labial or alveolar stops, e.g. /nd̥ ɥ̥ʷ ɿ̥/ [nd̥ʰ ɥ̥ʷ ɿ̥] ʰ ndup "to hit".

The tight-throat phone [ɤ̞̚] occurs as the realization of /ɤ̞/ in the high tone. That it is phonemically loose-throat is shown by its behaviour in tightness harmony in compound words.

Tones

- high [˥] – written -t
- high-mid [˥̊] or mid falling [˥̊̚] – written -x (written with diacritic ̂ over symbol in the syllabary)
- mid [˨̊] – unmarked
- low falling [˨̊̚] – written -p

The high-mid tone is only marginally contrastive. Its two main sources are from tone sandhi rules, as the outcome of a mid tone before another mid tone, and the outcome of a low-falling tone after a mid tone. However, these changes do not occur in all compounds where they might: for instance ʰ wo "bear" + ɿ mop "mother" regularly forms ʰ wo mox "female bear", but ʰ vi "jackal" + ɿ mop "mother" forms ʰ vi mop "female jackal" without sandhi. The syntax creates other contrasts: tone sandhi applies across the boundary between object and verb, so is present in SOV clauses like ʰ mu jy lu ti shex "Mujoy looks for Luti", but is absent in OSV clauses like ʰ mu jy lu ti shep "Luti looks for Mujoy". A few words, like ʰ xix "what?", have underlying high-mid tone.

Vocabulary and grammar

Nuosu is an analytic language, the basic word order is Subject–object–verb. Vocabularies of Nuosu can be divided into content words and function words. Among content words, nouns in Nuosu do not perform inflections for grammatical gender, number, and cases, classifiers are required when the noun is being counted; verbs do not perform conjugations for its persons and tenses; adjectives are usually placed after the word being

fixed with a structural particle and do not perform inflections for comparison. Function words, especially grammatical particles, have a significant role in terms of sentence constructions in Nuosu. Nuosu does not have article words, but conjunctions and postposition words are used.^[10]

Numbers

Classifiers are required when numbers are used for fixing nouns.

Number	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Yi script		𪛗	𪛘	𪛙	𪛚	𪛛	𪛜	𪛝	𪛞	𪛟	𪛠	𪛡	𪛢
Reading		tsh̥ɿ	ɲi	sɿ	li	ŋw	fú	ʂɿ	hɿ	gū	tsh̥ɿ	tsh̥ɿtsh̥ɿ	tsh̥ɿɲi

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 - Chen Kang [陈康] (2010), 彝语方言研究 [A study of Yi dialects], Beijing: Minzu University of China Press

Further reading

- Collective book, *Ritual for Expelling Ghosts, A religious Classic of the Yi nationality in Liangshan Prefecture, Sichuan*. The Taipei Ricci Institute (November 1998) ISBN 957-9185-60-3.

- Ma Linying, Dennis Elton Walters, Susan Gary Walters (editors). *Nuosu Yi-Chinese-English Glossary* (<https://web.archive.org/web/20140918052528/http://www.yihanyingcihui.net/>). Nationalities Publishing House (2008). ISBN 978-7-105-09050-1/H.638.

External links

- Yi font by SIL (http://scripts.sil.org/cms/scripts/page.php?site_id=nrsi&id=SILYi_home)
 - Pronunciation of Yi Consonant and Vowel (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m43KpZ_90d4)
 - Learn Yi Vocabulary (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNl9qK3trDQ>)
 - Yi language edition of the People's Daily (<http://yi.people.com.cn/>)
 - Yi keyboard input (<https://web.archive.org/web/20101124065825/http://kdd.cc/fl/ime/yi/>)
 - 600 Phrases in the Liangshan Yi Dialect (<http://www.babelstone.co.uk/Yi/contents.html>)
 - Large Chinese forum dedicated to speaking and studying Yi language (<http://bbs.yizuren.com/forumdisplay.php?fid=8>)
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